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DELIVERED BEFORE

KNOX COLLEGE

Metaphysical & Literary Society

BY THE PRESIDENT,

H. H. McPHERSON, M.A.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 28TH, 1873:

REV. PRINCIPAL CAVEN IN THE CHAIR.

PUBLISHED BY THE SOCIETY.

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INAUGURAL ADDRESS.

*To the Members of Knox College Metaphysical
and Literary Society.*

GENTLEMEN,—At this the first Public Meeting of our Society for the present academic year, it is my duty to deliver the usual Inaugural Address. I am required to speak to you on some suitable subject. What that subject shall be you kindly leave entirely to my own choice. Before, however, announcing any definite subject, there are one or two things which I must do. It would be unpardonable on my part were I to forget, first of all, to thank you for electing me to the position which I have to occupy during the present session. Though I do not wish to magnify my office, yet, out of respect to you as members of the Society and as Students, preparing for the office of the Christian Ministry, I must say that the position to which you have elected me is one of honor as well as of responsibility. I must, therefore, thank you for reposing such confidence in me as you have done in electing me to the position. Especially must I do so when I am conscious of my inability to perform the duties of the office with the efficiency and credit manifested by my predecessors.

I must, also, congratulate the Society on the very prosperous state in which it is at the present time. From the very beginning of the present session, the attendance at the ordinary meetings has been larger than it has probably ever been in former years; and there is now no reason to believe that the attendance will at all decrease. The interest also taken by the members in the proceedings of the Society has largely increased. Another thing indicating the prosperity of the Society, and on which it is to be congratulated, is, the present satisfactory condition of its Constitution. In the year 1869 the Constitution was printed, so that all the members of the Society might be thoroughly acquainted with the laws by which its proceedings should be regulated. From time to time certain members heartily interested in the welfare of the Society saw defects in that Constitution; and others saw places in it where they thought there was room for improvement. A few others again—not reform, but conservative in their principles—could see neither defect nor room for improvement in the good old Constitution. The reformers brought forward their measures and the conservatives opposed. The consequence was, that, after several hard and yet no doubt profitable struggles, several important amendments to the Constitution were, from time to time, successfully made. One important measure, for example, was, the insertion of an article providing for voluntary Readings and open Debates once every month. Any member may now speak and read before the Society as often as he may desire. Another improvement is the appointment of a permanent critic, whose duty it is to criticise the elocution of the readings and speeches at the ordinary meetings of the Society. Such were the improvements made, that, at the beginning of the present session, it was found absolutely necessary to have the

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Allow me to make one more preliminary remark. I wish to say a word or two regarding the object of the Society. The primary and immediate object is, to cultivate good reading, correct composition, and fluent *extempore* speaking upon literary, philosophical, and scientific questions; and the ultimate object—the grand final end we have in view—is to fit ourselves, as far as it lies in our power, for the great work before us in after life. You all know how very important it is that the word of God should be read in such a way, that those to whom it is read should catch its meaning, just as they would when spoken to. To the furtherance of this object, the exercises of the Society undoubtedly tend. They serve also to promote another object, of perhaps still more importance, viz. :—to develop the power of communicating to our fellow-men, in a clear and forcible manner, at any time, the all-important truths of the Christian Religion, and of defending, without hesitation, those truths against the assaults of all opponents. That it is the duty and privilege of every Student of our College to take an active interest in the proceedings of the Society will, therefore, be very evident to all. Those, in the first place, who are but beginning their College course, who have had no experience in public speaking and reading, and who, therefore, have not yet been able to control those emotional feelings which invariably attend one's first appearance in public, should be glad of the opportunity afforded by a Society such as ours, to overcome, or restrain those feelings. It is decidedly wrong for any person, if he can possibly avoid it, to make his first attempt at public speaking *in the pulpit*, because, in such a case, he is sure to be far more concerned

about his own state of mind, and his own success in the mere delivery of the discourse which he has prepared, than about the impression which the message of mercy ought to produce on the minds and hearts of the hearers. In the case of those of our numbers who are further advanced in their College course, and who consequently have had considerable experience in public speaking and reading, while engaged in mission work during the summer, and occasionally during the winter, we hold that the exercises of this Society are just as necessary as for those who have had no such experience at all. And here, by the way, we take occasion to correct a very prevalent error, regarding the motives which actuate students in conducting the services in the various mission stations in our city. We have heard it again and again said, that these stations give the young men a splendid "chance to try their skill" and see what they can do! It is really painful to hear such language—it is repugnant to all true christian feeling. Moreover, there is no ground, and can be no ground, whatever, for such a statement, for especially at the present time, owing to the plenteousness of the harvest, and the fewness of the laborers, the demand for preachers is really greater than the supply. If, then, the more advanced students have so many opportunities of speaking, apart from any Society such as this, why, it may be asked, are the exercises of the Society as necessary for them, as for those who may be only in their first year at College? We reply, that for them the grand object of the Society is, not merely to afford opportunities for speaking, but for *extemporaneous* speaking; and, what is of perhaps still more importance, for speaking upon literary, philosophical and scientific questions. You all know how soon and how insensibly one who is accustomed to speak only on sacred and solemn subjects, in sacred

places, and of voice, and a message by clergymen. Then, again, as students, live as one of the most abstract philosophy, and every thought upon them, subjects, and a gent opinion, on any one of pared to do this is in opposition forward for the tions of our faculty to develop this view in our Society.

The last message on which a few suggestions of new forms of instruction engaged in our clergyman to bring forward the most damaging sense of other defence of the called upon to the false philosophy scattered broad popular lectures.

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places, and on the sacred day, may acquire a tone of voice, and a manner of speaking, which is exhibited only by clergymen, and which, to say the least, is not natural. Then, again, is it not of very great importance that we, as students, living in an age which has been characterized as one of intense earnestness, in an age, too, in which the most abstruse questions in literature, science, and philosophy, are being popularized to such an extent that every thoughtful individual is tolerably well informed upon them, should be thoroughly familiar with these subjects, and able at a moment's notice to give an intelligent opinion, expressed in clear and forcible language, on any one of them? Above all, should we not be prepared to do this when these subjects appear to teach what is in opposition to Christianity, and when they are brought forward for the purpose of overthrowing the very foundations of our faith? To encourage and help one another to develop this power is, at least, one object we have in view in our Society.

The last mentioned object of our Society suggests a topic on which I now desire to speak. I purpose making a few *suggestions regarding the way to deal with the different forms of infidelity* with which we may be met while engaged in our great work. It is no very rare thing for a clergyman to meet men who have some objection or other to bring forward in opposition to Christian truth. It is most damaging in such cases, and especially in the presence of other persons, if he has not a word to say in defence of the truth. The clergyman, again, is often called upon to speak, and sometimes to write in opposition to the false philosophy, and false science which are being scattered broadcast throughout the country by means of popular lectures and popular writings. Since the very

establishment of Christianity, the great adversary of truth has had his agents employed in this destructive work. In every age he has a Celsus, a Porphyry, and a Julian, or a Hume and a Voltaire, or a Spencer, a Darwin, a Huxley, a Strauss and an Arnold. In opposition to these we rejoice to say that truth has had such noble apologists as Justin Martyr, Origin, and Tertullian, as Lardner, Butler, and Paley, and as Drs. Hodge, McCosh, Christlieb, and a host of others not afraid to throw down the gauntlet, and challenge to the contest any of the opponents of Christianity. On the side of truth we profess to be; and, therefore, for the defence and the upholding of truth, every favorable opportunity should be taken advantage of by us.

Regarding the way to deal with our opponents, the first suggestion I would make is, that we should *meet them on their own ground*. They bring forward arguments from their so-called philosophy and science. Hence, at first, it will not do to quote texts of Scripture in answer to their arguments, for many of them do not believe that the Bible is a revelation from God, and some of them do not admit even the existence of a God. You must first of all employ scientific arguments to support your position; and then, after you have done that, you may show that science and Scripture cannot be antagonistic the one to the other, for they are both revelations from the same Being—the only difference between them being, that one is natural, and the other supernatural; and that the one is designed for a different purpose from that of the other. As philosophy and science are revelations to us from God, through our natural faculties interpreting what is engraven on our own minds, and reading what is written on the pages of nature around us, we should

certainly use the weapons designed. We have taken our weapons, and we may triumph, we may give our own belief, give our cause of truth, the meeting of the great Dr. Theodor. "However great generations by borne in mind with scientific of the Church's steady from her inexhaustible the steadfastness ward, then," he modern unbelief the more gainful

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certainly use them for the purposes for which they were designed. We may thus demolish our enemies with the weapons taken out of their own hands. Every such triumph, we may rest assured, will strengthen us in our own belief, give us clearer views of it, and advance the cause of truth. In the noble words uttered at the recent meeting of the Evangelical Alliance in New York, by the great Dr. Theodore Christlieb, of the University of Bonn: "However great the harm may be which is done to whole generations by the systems of unbelief, yet it should be borne in mind that every earnest and honorable contest with scientific opponents has in the end always enriched the Church's store of truth, brought to light new weapons from her inexhaustible arsenal, and demonstrated anew the steadfastness of the foundations of our faith. Forward, then," he says, "must be our motto as against modern unbelieving science, too. The hotter the battle, the more gainful the issue."

But, while adopting this noble sentiment, we should bear in remembrance one important *caution*—never attempt to declaim against forms of infidelity unknown to, or unlikely to do any harm amongst, those for whose good we are laboring. Our grand object should be to get men to accept the offers of mercy through Jesus Christ, and thus glorify Him whose we are, and whom it is our duty to serve. If anything comes across our path which would hinder our progress in this great work, we should clear it away or tread it down as best we can; but there is no necessity for leaving our path to find out stumbling-blocks that might hinder our progress were they put in our path. When the enemy is near we should take straight aim; but, when too far off, we need not waste powder or shot. Our strength should be reserved till

occasion demands its exercise. When the proper time does come—when we find that the cause of truth is suffering from the attacks of unresisted opponents—it is our duty to enter upon the contest and offer a determined resistance. God has given us faculties for the discovery of truth and for the interpretation of what he has revealed, and He has given us powers for communicating that truth to others. We are responsible, therefore, if we allow it to be distorted or denied by false philosophy or false science. We should go manfully forward to the contest, teaching true philosophy and true science, and thus triumph over our opponents even on their own ground.

Still further, when we find it necessary to enter on the contest, not only should we meet our opponents on their own ground, but we should *admit the truth that may be in their systems*. It is probable that there is some truth in every system of unbelief. It does not seem possible that the human mind, blinded, though it may be, through the influence of a corrupt heart, should ever in reality believe pure, unmixed error which has not the slightest particle of truth in it. No one can believe that two and two are five. It has been frequently maintained, whether rightly or wrongly we do not now decide, that there is an element of truth in every error. Certain it is, however, that in many forms of error there is some truth: and we believe it is the truth, mixed up with the error, that gives the latter plausibility and force. Consequently, if the truth is separated from the error, the latter will lose much of its force, and be comparatively harmless. It will, moreover, tend to conciliate our opponent, if we admit that his position has some basis of fact for support, and that there is an element of truth in

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his belief. But if, on the other hand, we make the positive assertion that there is not the slightest foundation for his position, and not a particle of truth in his belief, we only anger him, and cause him to turn round and look with scorn on us as unscientific and unphilosophical men, who are speaking of what we are totally ignorant. A notable example may be drawn from the theory of evolution, of which so much has been made by scientific men in recent years. Look at the testimony of Dr. McCosh, of Princeton. "It is useless," he says, "to tell the younger naturalists that there is no truth in the doctrine of development, for they know that there is truth which is not to be set aside by denunciation." He admits that there is truth in the theory. He has no sympathy with those who denounce it, and says that religious philosophers might be more profitably employed in showing the religious aspect of the doctrine, than in ridiculing it as entirely without foundation. Having admitted whatever truth there is in the theory, we are prepared to show wherein it errs. We must allow that there has been a certain progressive development in nature; but we cannot admit the doctrine in its extreme form. Facts do not warrant the assumption that all living beings now existing have derived their existence from previous forms of life, and these again from previous ones, and so on, till at last we come to inanimate matter, in a chaotic state, as the origin of all. To allow that inanimate matter (or star-dust, as they call it in its original state), operating according to certain laws, has produced, by a process of self-development, all the forms of sensitive, intellectual, and moral life now existing, and that, too, without any interference on the part of God—this, surely, would be to admit far too much. While admitting, then, a certain element of truth in the theory of development,

wecan show our opponents that the doctrine, in its extreme form, is unsupported by facts, atheistic in its tendency, and, therefore, entirely inconsistent with other doctrines which are established by irrefutable evidence.

Again, in the system of Positivism, which is the philosophy of the majority of the atheistic scientific men of the present day, there is a great and important truth which we are slow to recognize, and which gives the system that appearance of entire truth which its advocates claim for it. The *truth* in it is this: there is no proper efficiency in what are known as physical causes. In other words, there is no real causal connection between the phenomena of nature. The fundamental *error* of the system is, that no cause whatever, in the proper sense of the term, exists, and that the uniform succession of phenomena is all that we can possibly know. But into this subject it would be out of place here to enter. Pantheism may be taken as another example to the same effect. You will perhaps be astonished if I say that there is an element of truth even in this system. It has been presented by its advocates in almost innumerable forms. Under all its forms, however, it amounts substantially to the following:—There is but one being in existence, and this one being is called God. It manifests itself in different ways. To us it appears in the forms of thought and extension. Hence, all things within and around us, are simply manifestations of the one substance, God, in these two forms. All intelligent beings are simply manifestations of the one substance viewed as possessed of thought; and all material things around us are manifestations of the same being viewed as extended. Now, the truth in the system is this: There is only one *self-existent* and independent Being; and all other beings

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derive their existence from Him, and are dependent entirely upon Him. God is, therefore, everywhere present, upholding all things by His power, and giving us evidences of His wisdom and goodness. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork." The hand of the Creator may be seen in all His works. Another truth taken from the system is, that God is the source of all power. He alone possesses absolute power, while all other beings possess only a delegated power—a power derived from Him, and which is inoperative without His sustaining power. But while we rejoice to admit that God is seen in all things, and that He is the source of all power, yet we demur to the statements that He is identified with all things, and that His power takes liberty away from the human will. The consciousness and the senses of every one of us tell us that, though the image of God may be seen in the human mind, and His glory in the works of nature, yet He is distinct both from us and them. My very nature tells me that I am dependent on, and accountable to, some Being distinct from myself and the finite things around me. To affirm, therefore, that I and they are identified with, or are mere manifestations of, that Being, is to say what is contrary to the dictates of my nature, and is, therefore, to me an absurdity. We have seen, then, that in each of these three theories, viz., Evolution, Positivism, and Pantheism, there is truth and error. When the truth is separated from the error, the latter falls, either as being unsupported by facts, or as absurd.

How, again, it may be asked, are we to find out what is truth and what error in any system? We answer: *Appeal to the proper sources of evidence*, and accept facts which are attested by satisfactory evidence, whether you

understand them or not. In scientific questions appeal to external observation; in philosophical and moral questions appeal to the dictates of your mental and moral nature; and in religious questions appeal to the Word of God. The theory of Evolution, for example, to which we have referred, falls when brought to the test of an adequate observation of facts. It was because Darwin went farther in his conclusions than facts warranted him, that the French Academy of Science condemned his work on "The Descent of Man," as in reality unscientific, and actually refused to allow him to become a member of the society. We need not further enlarge on the principle here suggested. True science, true philosophy, and true theology, consist in an adequate induction of facts made known by external observation, by consciousness of the Word of God, and in legitimate inferences from these facts. Any system, therefore, which is not supported by these facts, must be false.

I shall mention just another suggestion which may be of service to us in dealing with our opponents. It is this: we should *enquire into, and remove, if possible, the cause or causes which lead to their beliefs*. If we remove the cause, then, as a matter of course, we remove the effect. If you can show a man that the reason why he persists in his belief is not a sound one, but one totally unreasonable, then he will probably give up his belief. When a man once really knows that the foundation on which he is building is a sandy one, he must feel that his edifice is insecure. Now, there are at least two great causes of the forms of unbelief prevalent at the present day. To these let us briefly refer:

One great cause of unbelief is, the denial of the exist-

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entific questions appeal to philosophical and moral facts of your mental and moral life. It is an appeal to the Word of God, for example, to which men brought to the test of facts. It was because of the conclusions than facts war- academy of Science con- sistent of Man," as in which refused to allow him to do so. We need not further suggest. True science, however, consist in an adequate knowledge by external observation, of God, and in legitimate conclusions. Any system, therefore, which denies facts, must be false.

A suggestion which may be made to our opponents. It is to remove, if possible, the *ir* beliefs. If we remove them of course, we remove the ground that the reason why he found one, but one totally probably give up his belief. It is that the foundation on which he stands, he must feel that there are at least two unbelief prevalent at the time briefly refer:

is, the denial of the exist-

ence of a personal God. By a personal God we understand, not a being identified with nature, nor "a stream of tendency which makes for righteousness," nor yet a being somewhere away off in infinite space, who, as the ancient Epicureans supposed, sent the world a-spinning, and then retired to dwell at ease, and never more be concerned with the affairs of men; but we mean a Being who is the Creator and Governor of the universe—a Being whom we can address in the words 'Thou and Thee,' who is, therefore, distinct from ourselves and the world around us—and a Being on whom we and all things are dependent—a Being, moreover, possessed of intelligence, power, and goodness to which we can assign no limits. This is what we understand by a personal God; and the denial of the existence of such a Being, we say, is the cause of many forms of infidelity prevalent at the present day. Take, in illustration of this, the very prevalent disbelief in the possibility of miracles, and the belief in the theory of evolution, in the most extended sense of the term. The present Prime Minister of England has admirably said that, "Upon the ground of what is termed evolution, God is relieved of the labors of creation; and in the name of unchangeable laws, He is discharged from governing the world." The converse of this statement is equally true. We believe it is just because men do not wish to allow the existence of a supreme Being who has any right to interfere with the world, either as Creator or Governor of it, that they hold their infidel opinions. "We have *no need* of the hypothesis of God," is the statement of a French astronomer; and this is the general sentiment of that class of men to whom we have been referring. They want to explain all things without God. Hence they adopt unsupported and even absurd opinions. You are already familiar with the absurdity

involved in the extreme form of the evolution theory. But look at another example—the very prevalent disbelief in miracles. According to some, miracles are impossible, for the laws of nature are immutable—inexorable—and cannot be changed or suspended; and according to others, miracles, if not impossible, are at least incredible—no amount of evidence can warrant us in believing that they ever did happen. Now, what we wish to show here is, that no one, really believing in the existence of a personal God who keeps the heavenly bodies in their places, who is the author of all the beauty and grandeur of the universe, and “in whom we live, move, and have our being,” will ever dare to deny that He may not at any time, for some wise purpose, act in a manner different from what appears to us to be His uniform method. To hear some people talk of the “reign of law,” the “immutability of law,” &c., one would think that God was subject to something superior to, and independent of, Himself, and any attempt on His part to interfere with the order of nature would be a thing intolerable. But, when we consider that these laws are not things independent of God, and, in fact, have no meaning whatever unless we understand by them the uniform and regular method in which He, who is the source of all power, operates in the universe, then all ground for disbelief in miracles is removed. Nay, further, we contend that such supernatural interventions are not only possible, but highly probable, for when we think of the deep necessities of fallen human nature, if we allow the existence of a God of wisdom and goodness, it is just what we might expect that He should in some miraculous way make known His will to man. Belief in a personal God makes all clear regarding the credibility of miracles. We might show that the same thing is true

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regarding the efficacy of prayer. But we must hasten to a conclusion.

The other great cause of infidelity is the wrong state of the human heart. This in fact is the chief cause of all error. Indeed, we may safely say, that it is *the* cause of all that is wrong in the world. We are often amazed when we think that so many men like Huxley and J. S. Mill, possessed of vast erudition and wonderful intellectual power, hold such materialistic and atheistic principles as they do. But the explanation is to be found here, in the sad and lamentable fact, that the natural heart is averse to the truth of God. Hence, "as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge," He left them to the natural bent of their own inclinations, till at length their character and pitiable condition must be described in these words: "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."

In conclusion, I would simply urge upon you and upon myself the great lesson to be learned from the last mentioned cause of unbelief. It is not enough to teach mere philosophy and science, in dealing with our opponents. True, these may, and ought often to be used, but only as means in view of a higher end. You may point the atheist to the innumerable evidences of God's existence seen in the works of nature; you may tell him, who denies the existence of a personal God, that he carries about with him in his own body a living witness to the contrary; and you may tell him that his own consciousness, if only listened to, will give the lie to his expressed belief. You may do this with good effect. But above all we must preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which alone is the power of God unto salvation; and we must be more

earnest in prayer to God for the influences of His Spirit, who alone, teaching through the truth, can bring the light of truth home to the darkened heart, and conform the will of man to that of his Creator.



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